

Migration, Displacement, and the SDGs: A Civil Society Perspective

*Lisa Simeone,
Global Migration Policy Associates*

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The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: A Call for Transformation

- “Sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth is essential for prosperity. This will only be possible if wealth is shared and income inequality is addressed. We will work to build dynamic, sustainable, innovative and people-centred economies, promoting youth employment and women's economic empowerment, in particular, and decent work for all.”
- “We resolve to build a better future for all people, including the millions who have been denied the chance to lead decent, dignified and rewarding lives and to achieve their full human potential. We can be the first generation to succeed in ending poverty; just as we may be the last to have a chance of saving the planet.”
- “What we are announcing today - an Agenda for global action for the next fifteen years - is a charter for people and planet in the twenty-first century. Children and young women and men are critical agents of change and will find in the new Goals a platform to channel their infinite capacities for activism into the creation of a better world.”

Governance not Management

- “Large movements of refugees and migrants” means large movements of human beings; this is a matter for governance, not management. Any comprehensive attempt to improve international cooperation to address people on the move must therefore be considered in the context of *governance*, taking account of the existing framework for rights-based governance of migration.
- In particular, the core human rights conventions apply to all migrants—including refugees—regardless of status; the ICRMW establishes that all migrants in regular situations, including immigrants and recognized refugees, are entitled to equal and non-discriminatory treatment on the same basis as nationals with respect to employment; The broad array of international labour standards apply to all migrant workers; and persons fearing persecution or fleeing warfare and/or human rights violations are entitled to *international protection* and assistance as refugees.

The Right Not to Migrate

- Outside situations of extreme crisis, it is impossible to ascertain the degree of compulsion or even directly assess the causes motivating the decision to migrate.
- Nevertheless, it is safe to say that large-scale migration is generated by the failure of international development in many parts of the world.
- Migration should be a choice. No one should have to leave family and community behind for lack of decent work, and no country should be expected to pursue development based primarily on the engine of migrant remittances.

No Human is Illegal

- Ignoring the rights and well-being of irregular migrants destabilizes the global system, and thus the long-term interests of every state in the world.
- Terrorism, human trafficking, and the shadow economy feed on the desperation of poverty and oppression, and are abetted by the trauma inflicted on the migrants who attempt to escape it.
- Any security strategy, national or international, which disregards the human consequences of summary exclusion and the denial of due process, only exacerbates the problem.

The Remittance-for-Development Tautology

- The global labor market manifests simultaneous skill and labor deficits, which drives increased international mobility *and* growing competition for skills.
- Under these circumstances, equating development with remittances runs the risk of reinforcing the competitive advantages of wealthier states better able to attract skilled migrants.
- Circular migration programs that compromise the rights of non-citizens occupy the other side of this equation, and are equally short-sighted, while encouraging exploitation.

A planetary problem

- Climate change, desertification, land degradation and biodiversity loss are central features in both gradual and crisis-driven migration movements, due to the depletion of environments that can sustain livelihoods.
- In addition, migrants are particularly vulnerable to a reliance on pesticides in agriculture, industrial contamination, environmental exposure to chemical toxins and lack of adequate infrastructure to support growing urban population. These are all factors that may also contribute to emigration.
- It is critical to consider the ways in which low-cost migrant labor serves to prolong unsustainable production and consumption patterns for short-term gain.

Recommendations

- Appreciate the relevance and utility of existing normative instruments for rights-based governance of human mobility at every level;
- Prioritize institutional transparency and accountability for ensuring protection of people on the move;
- Systematically solicit and incorporate the perspectives of civil society—and migrant, migrant-led, and labour organizations in particular—in the formulation and implementation of law, policy, and practice at every level;
- Address gender in all aspects of migration governance;
- Emphasize both the necessity and the benefits of opening legal channels of migration for work, as well as regularizing long term unauthorized residents;
- As emphasized in the SDGs, consider migrants as intrinsic to the broad-based investment in the food security, physical and mental health, education, and general well-being of people everywhere - in both sending and receiving contexts - within a non-discriminatory policy framework that reduces inequality and encourages sustainable consumption and production patterns.